



Idaho National Laboratory

# **Work Capacity Evaluations as a Means to Reduce Job Injuries**

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# WCE Testing

- **Emerging as a significant health and safety tool**
- **Integral part of occupational health and safety management**
- **Current fit-for-duty programs are made up of various constituent parts rather than having a comprehensive perspective**
- **Structured approach required**

# **Definition of fit-for-duty can cover a broad range of issues**

- **Drug and Alcohol Use**
- **Background Check**
- **Fatigue**
- **Psychological issues**
- **Job Matching**
- **Physical limitations**

# Job Task Analysis

- What are the essential functions vs marginal functions of the job?
- What activities are involved in the essential functions?
- What physical functions are required? Lifting, bending, twisting, etc.
- How frequently are these activities performed? What are the endurance factors?
- Degree of strength required.
- Duration of walking, sitting, standing.
- Physical demands on shoulders, back, legs and arms.
- What tools and equipment are required?
- What postures are involved?
- What are the heights and weights of objects to be moved and/or lifted?
- What are the environmental factors? temperature, light, noise, floor surface, fumes, chemicals, PPE's.
- Hours of work, break periods, interaction with peers and the public, independence of work.

# Fit-for-Duty Goals

## 1. Job Analysis

- **Eliminates confusion**
  - **What HR says the job is**
  - **What the manager says the job is**
  - **What the supervisor says the job is**
  - **What the employee says the job is**
  - **What the IH says the job is**
- **Assesses objectively job demands and essential functions**
- **Establishes physical demand ranges**

# Fit-for-Duty Goals

## 2. Work Capacity Testing

- Provides objective information of injured workers returning to physically demanding jobs
- Ascertains the employees' ability to perform the essential functions of the job during the hiring process
- Identifies workers at continued risk for musculoskeletal injury
- Aligns the workers' functional ability to their job demands

# Fit-for-Duty Goals

## 3. Medical Evaluation

- Places appropriate work restrictions based on testing results and physical examination
- Makes the determination as to whether an inability will prevent an employee from being employed
- Establishes baselines for certification or surveillance purposes

# Major Issues with an aging workforce

- **Declining fitness and health levels**
- **Management of employees carrying existing injuries**
- **Increased risk of repeat injuries (especially manual handling)**
- **Increased challenges associated with rehabilitation**
- **Increased risk of lifestyle and age-related injuries (diabetes, heart disease, strains and sprains)**



# **Cost of an Injured Employee to the Corporation**

- **Workers compensation claims**
- **Increased OSHA recordable injuries**
- **DART case rate**
- **Reasonable accommodation (>50+ employees)**
- **Light duty assignment**
- **Decreased morale among impacted employees (>% of the physical work shifted )**
- **Loss of investment (employee/training)**

# Fit-For-Duty Processes

- 1. Job Task Analysis (much more detailed than a job description)**
- 2. Pre-Offer**
  - Employer cannot ask any questions or perform any evaluation that would elicit any information about a disability**
- 3. Post-Offer**
  - Conditional offer after the successful completion of disability-related inquiries and evaluations**
- 4. Return to Work**
  - Placing or validating appropriate work restrictions**
- 5. For cause or post accident evaluation**
- 6. Fitness Qualifications (firefighters, police and security forces)**
- 7. Establishing functional baselines**

# Pre-Offer Testing

- **Advantage – is that this type of testing allows the company to significantly reduce the size of the applicant pool**
- **Prohibits all disability related inquiries and medical examinations even if job related that seek information about physical or mental disabilities**
- **Can assess an individual's ability to perform actual or simulated job tasks, i.e. show me how you would.....**

# Post-Offer Pre-Placement Testing

- After a bona fide job offer is extended but before they start work the ADA allows disability inquiries and medical examination regardless of whether they are job related as long as it does so for ALL being hired in the same job category.
- Job offer is conditional on passing post-offer inquiries and tests
- Administered to all new or incumbent employees competitively entering the same job category
- Testing is based on the essential functions of the job not the physical demands (3 step process)
  - Job Task Analysis
  - Test Development
  - Test Validation (incumbent employees in the same job category)

# Return to Work

- The private physician typically does not have access to the job task analysis and in turn may place a general non-specific restriction (lifting, pushing, pulling, standing, sitting, etc)
- Our occupational physician have stated that generic medicals have not been adequate for assessing an employee's capacity for particular types of work and particular jobs.
- Medical exam are being augmented with more targeted assessments that can be more accurately matched against the requirements of the job.
- Testing can validate the accuracy of the restriction

# Benefits of Fit-for-Duty testing

- **Work force readiness**
- **Lost-time injury cost reduction**
- **Apportionment**
- **Appropriate job matching**
- **Reasonable accommodation**
- **Testing can act as a “screening” mechanism i.e. identifying employees who are at risk of injury before they actually had the injury.**
- **Establishing a baseline to document declines in fitness levels due to injury or inactivity.**